

Fladbury Ward Cllr Tom McDonald report to Charlton Parish Council January 2012

Dear Clerk & Colleagues

My report this month is simply to wish all a good new year and a prosperous 2012

But within the council work has started with a bang! and last week I advocated at a planning committee reference an affordable housing exception site in Cropthorne. My position and that of the residents was against the officer's recommendation for approval for many reasons. My baseline comments may be of interest and are as below:

Madame Chairman

This application is of grave concern to Cropthorne residents and their Parish Council. Many of these concerns are listed within the representation section of the officers' report and highlight a lack of consultation, infrastructure and services limitations, inappropriate property design and build, and changes of character and space in a rural setting.

Let me emphasise that the need for Affordable Homes is not in dispute, neither, in exceptional circumstances, is the permission of Rural Exception Sites as defined within Policy SWDP 32.

In planning terms, however, within the four demonstrations calling for compliance to SWDP 32, Section C raises a serious weakness, as does compliance with policy COM 3 of the Wychavon Local Plan which states:

'For reasons of sustainability the council considers it generally inappropriate to locate new affordable houses on sites that do not have ready access to services and facilities'

Cropthorne is a traditional village with highway and utilities limitations in the location under consideration and I believe that not to be in dispute. Immediate access is by Field Barn Lane, a road of varying width, largely single track, unlit with no footpaths, two blind junctions and a notoriously dangerous junction at the interface with the B4048 Evesham/Pershore Road.

Perhaps members may wish to seek clarification from the highways representative on what has been done to ensure that these additional 8 houses are a good fit in this location or indeed if additional work is required. Furthermore, lanes such as Field Barn Lane are the subject of a low maintenance regime - would that be acceptable to encourage development along its length? With that in mind I draw your attention to the comment made in the Housing Manager's section:

The development plan site includes further land to the south (site frontage approximately 90 meters) that would likely be brought forward to open market if allocation were in due course confirmed.

My community would have grave concerns about the potential for further housing in the vicinity of the current application site and the Council needs to be sure that the highway infrastructure is adequate before considering development here.

We really need to work to a localism agenda, remembering that Cropthorne is but one of 14 Category 2 listed villages across the district. We need proper consultation.

Madame Chairman, I know the committee have a difficult task to ensure that we deliver affordable homes in our rural areas but we also need to make sure, when we are looking at specific sites, that adequate infrastructure is available and, moreover, that the character of the villages would not be compromised by the development.

Such safeguards are important and in the case of Crophorne have not been met. I therefore on their behalf call for rejection of this application.
Tom McDonald Fladbury Ward Councillor

Decision deferred re emphasis on design

The Crophorne stand on this issue has had value as they will have consultation at the next phase. In terms of the bigger picture the emerging SWDP will ultimately become material planning conditions and that will need watching re rural exception sites (Charlton is not listed)

Some background information (source; Nat Housing Federation West Midlands)
Wychavon

Average house price = £250,000

Average income = £18,000

Households on waiting list = 4,033

Housing associations are doing their utmost best to maintain supply in difficult circumstances. Last year associations built 48% of all new homes in the region whilst development by private homebuilders fell by 21%

At the end of the month I make a report to the O&S Committee on Economic Development (my portfolio) and I may make some comment later on that, but an interesting statistic is as below

Unemployment and Skills⁽³⁾

The unemployment rate in Worcestershire is higher than in the West Midlands or England as a whole, but within Wychavon we have the lowest unemployment rate at 3% of the total workforce. In relation to youth unemployment (18 to 24 year olds) two Wychavon wards, Harvington & Norton (13.1%) and Great Hampton (12.5%) are currently the highest claimant rates. Employer surveys of the West Midlands have shown more businesses are experiencing hard to fill vacancies and skill shortage vacancies (SSVs). There has been a small increase in establishments offering training but apprenticeships remain at a low level.

Transport Planning (Greater Western Rail Franchise) - an important opportunity
At Council Executive Board on Tuesday I called for endorsement of a letter received from the County Council reference rail travel. Basically the county is served by 4 rail franchises one of which is Greater Western franchise. First Group have indicated they will end their involvement as from match next year and the county council have approached our district believing the tendering process is an important opportunity to address some of the issues associated with the quality of rail services covered by the GW franchise. Issues such as reliability and dealing with over congestion that often happens between London Paddington and Oxford, dealing with these through more frequent rail services, a two hour journey time London to Worcester. The County paper recognised the creation of a Worcester Parkway Station to make the area more accessible, interchange facilities at Evesham and the early delivery of a car park at Pershore Station and a rail journey that is customer friendly with good/best price ticketing arrangement supported by rolling that will provide a comfortable journey.

Endorsement given and we will work with county and other partners

The replacement of the Evesham 'Abbey Bridge' and viaduct (2013) has been a key involvement. As the WDC representative on the Bridge Committee little can be said at this time except that the Government supports the bid and the scheme is now in their programme. WCC are at the stage where the design and build contract has yet to be confirmed etc. In terms of traffic management the bridge closure will be less than originally expected and, at my request; a number of options are now to be explored. In terms of design, I believe that fuller detail on the bridge will be made available by mid /end January and the future programme will include a consultation period.

As to other issues please be aware of a Wychavon booklet on Community Grants Scheme may be of interest as it covers a wide ranging area on involvement, there is a March closure date

New Homes bonus the parish has a £256 contribution, value and protocol leaflet attached. WDC will be proactive in these requests supported by a project plan etc.

Tom (McDonald)